


ADDRESS
OF
THE PRESIDENT
ON LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY

DELIVERED BY RADIO
FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

ON
THURSDAY EVENING
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ADDRESS

By the magic of the radio I am able to address several hundred public gatherings called this evening throughout our country in celebration of the birth of Abraham Lincoln.

It is appropriate that I should speak from this room in the White House where Lincoln strived and accomplished his great service to our country.

His invisible presence dominates these halls, ever recalling that infinite patience and that indomitable will which fought and won the fight for those firmer foundations and greater strength to government by the people. From these windows he looked out upon that great granite shaft which was then in construction to mark the country's eternal tribute to the courage and uncompromising strength of the founder of this Union of States.

Here are the very chairs in which he meditated upon his problems. Above the mantelpiece hangs his portrait with his Cabinet, and upon this fireplace is written:

"In this room Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, whereby 4,000,000 slaves were given their freedom and slavery forever prohibited in these United States."

It was here that he toiled by day and by night that the Union created by the fathers might be preserved and that slavery might be ended.

Most of the business of this room in Lincoln's time was concerned with the conduct of war against destructive forces. From here he could oft hear the sound of approaching cannon, and yet the thought that he should desert his place, this city and this house, never entered into his considerations. Lincoln was a builder in an epoch of destruction. It was his assignment by Providence to restore the national edifice, so badly shattered in its social and economic structure that it had well-nigh failed. His undying idealism and inflexible resolve builded a new temple of the national soul in which our succeeding generations have since dwelt secure and free and of a richer life.

And if Lincoln could to-day resurvey the scene of his country he would find a union more solidly knit and more resolute in its common purpose than ever in its history. He would find the States of the

South recovered from the wounds of war, inspired by the splendid leadership of a new generation to a brilliant renaissance of industry and culture.

He would indeed find the consummation of that great moving appeal of his inaugural in which he said: "The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." It was indeed a great prophecy.

If Lincoln were living, he would find that this race of liberated slaves, starting a new life without a shred but the clothes in which they stood, without education, without organization, has to-day by its own endeavors progressed to an amazingly high level of self-reliance and well-being. To Lincoln it would have been incredible that within a lifetime the millions of children of these slaves would be graduating from the public schools and colleges, that the race could have builded itself homes and accumulated itself a wealth in lands and savings; that it should have carried on with success every calling and profession in our country.

While the dramatic period of Lincoln's life was engrossed with these tremendous problems, yet he was a man of many interests. He was a believer in party government. He realized, as we also must realize, that fundamentally our whole self-government is conceived and born of majority rule, and to enable the majority to express itself we must have party organization. Lincoln led in founding the Republican Party and he gloried in his party. His tradition has dominated it to this day. It was and is a party of responsibility; it was and is a party of the Constitution.

While many of the issues of that time are dead and gone, some of our present problems were equally vivid in his day. You will find Lincoln addressing the country in strong and urgent support of the protective tariff with vivid declamation against the party opposing that policy. You will find him advocating Federal Government aid in internal development of waterways, rivers and harbors, and transportation. You will find him pounding at the public mind against nullification and for adherence to constitutional processes of government. No stronger statement has ever been made than that of Lincoln upon obedience to law as the very foundation of our Republic.

In Lincoln's day the dominant problem in our form of government turned upon the issue of States rights. Though less pregnant with disaster, the dominant problem to-day in our form of government turns in large degree upon the issue of the relationship of Federal, State, and local government responsibilities. We are faced with unceasing agitation that the Federal Government shall assume

new financial burdens, that it shall undertake increased burdens in regulation of abuses and in the prosecution of crime.

It is true that since Lincoln's time many forces have swept across State borders and have become more potent than the State or local community can deal with alone either financially or by jurisdiction. Our concept of Federal, State, and local responsibilities is possible of no unchangeable definitions and it must shift with the moving forces in the Nation, but the time has come when we must have more national consideration and decision of the part which each shall assume in these responsibilities.

The Federal Government has assumed many new responsibilities since Lincoln's time, and will probably assume more in the future when the States and local communities can not alone cure abuse or bear the entire cost of national programs, but there is an essential principle that should be maintained in these matters. I am convinced that where Federal action is essential then in most cases it should limit its responsibilities to supplement the States and local communities, and that it should not assume the major rôle or the entire responsibility, in replacement of the States or local government. To do otherwise threatens the whole foundations of local government, which is the very basis of self-government.

The moment responsibilities of any community, particularly in economic and social questions, are shifted from any part of the Nation to Washington, then that community has subjected itself to a remote bureaucracy with its minimum of understanding and of sympathy. It has lost a large part of its voice and its control of its own destiny. Under Federal control the varied conditions of life in our country are forced into standard molds, with all their limitations upon life, either of the individual or the community. Where people divest themselves of local government responsibilities they at once lay the foundation for the destruction of their liberties.

And buried in this problem lies something even deeper. The whole of our governmental machinery was devised for the purpose that through ordered liberty we give incentive and equality of opportunity to every individual to rise to that highest achievement of which he is capable. At once when government is centralized there arises a limitation upon the liberty of the individual and a restriction of individual opportunity. The true growth of the Nation is the growth of character in its citizens. The spread of government destroys initiative and thus destroys character. Character is made in the community as well as in the individual by assuming responsibilities, not by escape from them. Carried to its logical extreme, all this shouldering of individual and community responsibility upon the Government can lead but to the superstate where every man

becomes the servant of the State and real liberty is lost. Such was not the government that Lincoln sought to build.

There is an entirely different avenue by which we may both resist this drift to centralized government and at the same time meet a multitude of problems. That is to strengthen in the Nation a sense and an organization of self-help and cooperation to solve as many problems as possible outside of government. We are to-day passing through a critical test in such a problem arising from the economic depression.

Due to lack of caution in business and to the impact of forces from an outside world, one-half of which is involved in social and political revolution, the march of our prosperity has been retarded. We are projected into temporary unemployment, losses, and hardships. In a Nation rich in resources, many people were faced with hunger and cold through no fault of their own. Our national resources are not only material supplies and material wealth but a spiritual and moral wealth in kindness, in compassion, in a sense of obligation of neighbor to neighbor and a realization of responsibility by industry, by business, and the community for its social security and its social welfare.

The evidence of our ability to solve great problems outside of Government action and the degree of moral strength with which we emerge from this period will be determined by whether the individuals and the local communities continue to meet their responsibilities.

Throughout this depression I have insisted upon organization of these forces through industry, through local government and through charity, that they should meet this crisis by their own initiative, by the assumption of their own responsibilities. The Federal Government has sought to do its part by example in the expansion of employment, by affording credit to drought sufferers for rehabilitation, and by cooperation with the community, and thus to avoid the opiates of government charity and the stifling of our national spirit of mutual self-help.

We can take courage and pride in the effective work of thousands of voluntary organizations for provision of employment, for relief of distress, that have sprung up over the entire Nation. Industry and business have recognized a social obligation to their employees as never before. The State and local governments are being helpful. The people are themselves succeeding in this task. Never before in a great depression has there been so systematic a protection against distress; never before has there been so little social disorder; never before has there been such an outpouring of the spirit of self-sacrifice and of service.

The ever-growing complexity of modern life, with its train of evermore perplexing and difficult problems, is a challenge to our individual characters and to our devotion to our ideals. The resourcefulness of America when challenged has never failed. Success is not gained by leaning upon government to solve all the problems before us. That way leads to enervation of will and destruction of character. Victory over this depression and over our other difficulties will be won by the resolution of our people to fight their own battles in their own communities, by stimulating their ingenuity to solve their own problems, by taking new courage to be masters of their own destiny in the struggle of life. This is not the easy way, but it is the American way. And it was Lincoln's way.

The ultimate goal of the American social ideal is equality of opportunity and individual initiative. These are not born of bureaucracy. This ideal is the expression of the spirit of our people. This ideal obtained at the birth of the Republic. It was the ideal of Lincoln. It is the ideal upon which the Nation has risen to unparalleled greatness.

We are going through a period when character and courage are on trial, and where the very faith that is within us is under test. Our people are meeting this test. And they are doing more than the immediate task of the day. They are maintaining the ideals of our American system. By their devotion to these ideals we shall come out of these times stronger in character, in courage, and in faith.



